

Professional Development Curriculum: Student Development Assessment at William Paterson University

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What is Assessment?

- In layman's terms assessment is a process of determining if, and to what extent, you have accomplished your goals, and how you know you have done so.
- In higher education, assessment has been defined as "the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development."

[Marchese, T. J. (1987) Third Down, Ten Years to Go. American Association of Higher Education Bulletin, 40, 3-8.]

Assessment Vocabulary

The following are key terms you will encounter in student development assessment at William Paterson University:
(most definitions taken from links below)

- [Baseline](#) - A software product of Campus Labs used to collect, report, and organize data related to assessment projects
- [Benchmark](#) - A standard by which a specific goal can be measured or judged
- [Campus Labs](#) - A company that provides software products and consulting services to support assessment, strategic planning and student engagement
- [CAS Standards](#) - “Founded in 1979, The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) is the pre-eminent force for promoting standards in student affairs, student services, and student development programs.” CAS promulgates “[general standards](#)” in 12 areas and [specific standards](#) in 43 functional areas”
- [Compliance Assist](#) - A software product of Campus Labs used to link planning and assessment at the institutional (mission, strategic plans), divisional and unit levels with specific activities and assessment plans intended to further those goals and objectives and determine extent of success.
- [Collegiate Link](#) - A software product of Campus Labs used to track and organize student engagement activities – referred to at William Paterson University as ‘Pioneer Life.’
- [Direct Assessment](#) - Assessment to gauge student achievement of a desired outcome directly from their behavior or work products
- [Goal](#) - The general aims and purposes of a program
- [Indirect Assessment](#) - Assessment that deduces student attainment of a desired outcome from self-reporting or the perceptions of others

Assessment Vocabulary

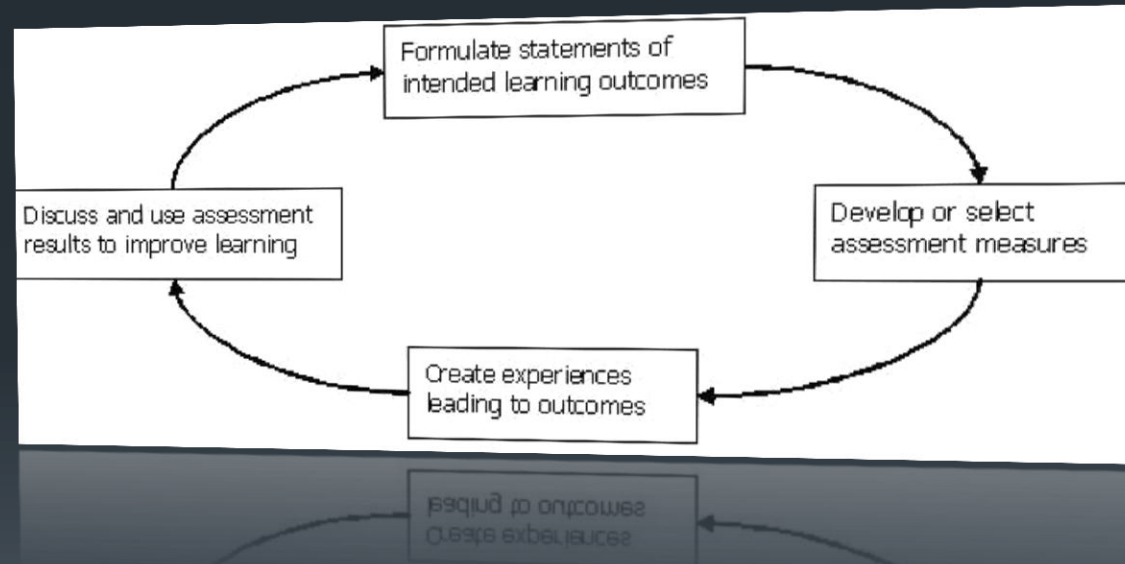
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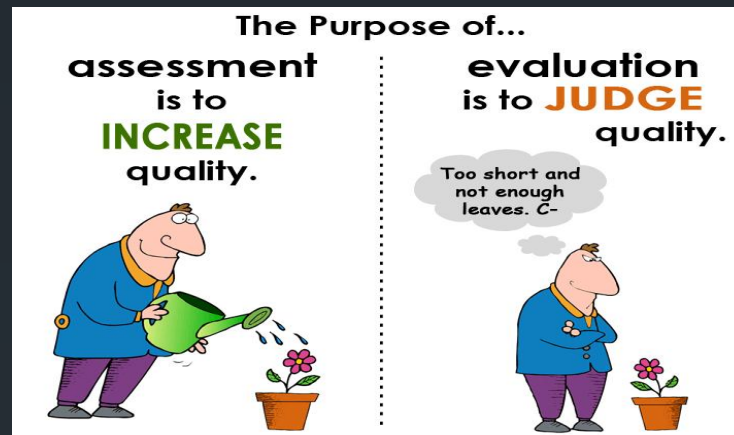
- [Mission Statement](#) - The top level description of the purposes of an organization (institutional mission, divisional mission, departmental mission etc.)
- [Metric](#) - A specific data point used to describe performance (e.g., one-year retention rate is a metric used to describe institutional performance in the area of student retention)
- [NSSE](#) - National Survey of Student Engagement – a national survey that WP administers in spring of even years to assess the extent of engagement of freshman and senior students on five benchmarks of effective educational practice
- [Objective](#) - A more precise statement of what is to be accomplished to fulfill a goal
- [Outcome](#) - An end result or consequence that one wishes to measure
- [Portfolio](#) - A collection of materials or other artifacts that demonstrate the extent of attainment of a goal or objective
- [Rubric](#) - A technique for assessment of student performance or behavior involving defining the key characteristics of the performance and the various levels of achievement of those characteristics
- [Strategic Plan](#) - A planning document that connects broad mission, goals and objectives with the specific tasks and activities necessary to accomplish them (link downloads a .pdf to the browser)
- [Student Engagement](#) - Similar to “involvement,” the amount of time and effort students devote to their lives at the University, both in and out of the classroom AND how the institution organizes resources and services to encourage students to participate in and benefit from such activities (Wolf-Wendel et al., Journal of College Student Development, Volume 50, Number 4, July/August 2009, p. 407-428)

- **“Statements of intended outcomes”** may be derived from the institutional mission statement, vision statement, core values, division mission statement, individual department mission statements and associated goals, objectives.
- **“Assessment measures”** may be surveys, student work products or behaviors, rubrics, focus groups and other quantitative or qualitative measures of the outcome sought
- **“Experiences”** should be understood to mean institutional, divisional or departmental programs or services thought to support the attainment of the related outcome
- **“Program Improvement”** is the process by which the results of assessment are used to improve programs and services to better reach the intended outcome

The Assessment “Loop”

at a conceptual level, the assessment process may be portrayed below as a “feedback loop.”





Two Purposes for Assessment

Improvement

- Formative (purpose = improvement)
- Used to enhance teaching and learning (internal)
- Accomplished directly by practitioners (faculty/administrators) acting within the parameters of the teaching and learning process
- Incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods

Accountability

- Summative (purpose = judgment)
- Provides evidence that funded enterprise is effective and worth continuing support (external)
- Information gathered from an external “objective” standpoint
- Institutional compliance
- Predominantly uses quantitative methods



Student Development Assessment at WP – A Brief History

- The Division of Student Development at William Paterson has been actively engaged in [assessment](#) since 2007.
- This [link](#) details the Division's progress over time and the goals and outcomes of each year's work since 2007-2011.

Guiding WP Documents

The first step in the “Assessment Loop” is to formulate statements or metrics describing or establishing intended outcomes.

- At William Paterson, these statements are derived from documents putting forth our:
 - [Mission Statement, Vision and Core Values](#)
 - [Strategic Plan](#)
 - Board of Trustees “[Dashboard Targets](#)” (1/26/12 update)
 - Division of Student Development [Mission Statement](#)
 - [Unit Mission Statements](#): (found at each department home page)
 - [University Core Curriculum Student Learning Outcomes](#)
 - CAS Standards ([general](#) and [functional area](#))

An Example of An Assessment Loop

- Residence Life pursues the following mission statement: *“To provide learning opportunities in a diverse residential environment which supplements traditional education through programs, role modeling, leadership opportunities and community development. Through these efforts we believe our community members will develop into productive, healthy, well-rounded individuals who achieve success in their future endeavors.”*
- The connection to the Divisional Mission statement, the University Strategic Plan and the CAS Standards includes the following shared threads:
 - Learning beyond the classroom
 - Experiential, extracurricular and co-curricular opportunities
 - Community engagement
 - Learning communities
 - Enhancing sense of community
- In support of these threads from University guiding documents the Office of Residence Life created the “Freshman Connections Program” and the “Peer Academic Leaders” (PAL) programs.
- The “Freshman Connections Program” was designed to “ease the transition for first-year students” and to “encourage first-year students to embrace the many exciting opportunities available to them on campus.” The program included all first-year students being assigned to specific residence halls, and mentoring by “Peer Academic Leaders” who will also “staff open study hours in the residence halls, especially during evenings and weekends and will also provide programs for resident students.”
- The Residence Life leadership surveyed freshman students using an instrument and a focus group (although too few students attended the focus group to derive valid and reliable feedback).
- As a result of the assessment, Residence Life Leadership will enhance the program (e.g., close the loop via program improvement) by having PALs join freshmen in their First-Year Seminar classes, move-in early to assist with move-in, set standard tutoring hours in consistent locations.

Additional Resources

Campus Labs Webinars

(requires WP Connect login privileges)

- [Developing An Assessment Plan](#)
- [Designing An Assessment Project](#)
- [How to use Baseline – An Intro](#)
- [How to use Baseline – Reporting Tools](#)
- [Basic Stat and Quantitative Analysis I](#)
- [Building an Institutional Culture of Assessment](#)

Other Web Resources

For new Student Development Staff

- [Boston College Student Affairs Assessment Curriculum](#)
- [SUNY Albany - Assessment Education Professional Development Program](#)
- [NASPA Student Development Assessment Web Resources](#)
- [NC State Assessment Presentation](#)